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The Refugee Experiences of Somali Women: A Qualitative Study

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

This research project and thesis is dedicated to the Somali women who were courageous enough to share their stories. Their words, body expressions, grief, and optimism is difficult to accurately portray through words. I respect the women and learned from them. Most of all, I was able to observe their emotions and explore with them their past and present journeys. Thank you for sharing a glimpse of your lives with me. I believe that if we are to live in peace, we must first learn about our neighbors and the suffering that they have endured.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article I

Eleanor Roosevelt's International Bill of Human Rights

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Abstract

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Research on the refugee experiences of Somali women is limited. This qualitative study contributes to the existing research on refugee issues by focusing on the experiences and meaning for Somali women who have survived war, fled from their homeland, and were resettled into a new country. An interview guide was used to conduct in-depth interviews with three Somali women about their meaning to their experiences of being a refugee and resettlement into a new country. Content analysis was used to find common themes about the Somali women's refugee experiences. Results of the study concluded that the refugee experience of leaving one's homeland and loved ones, witnessing war and violence, living in a refugee camp, and moving to an unfamiliar environment and culture has impacted who these woman are today. A strong belief in the Islamic religion, prayer, and the appreciation for life and safety have been motivating factors for survival. Implications for social work practice that are included in this research discuss the importance of having knowledge about the culture, customs, and religious faith of the Somali population when working with Somali clients. Use of ecological systems theory and cognitive theory guide us in understanding the refugee experience and how individuals are impacted by their experiences and separation from their familiar social support.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The problem to be studied in this research project is the lack of knowledge and scholarly research that examines the Somali refugee experience. This is a concern for communities where there is a large influx of Somali refugees, as in Minnesota. Once the refugees are resettled into new communities, they will be interacting with other people within those communities. They may need to grocery shop, use public transportation, utilize social services, interact with schools, begin to search for jobs, etc. These basic needs that everyone has are typically taken for granted for individuals who were born in the United States, speak English as their first language, and are familiar with the cultural norms most prevalent in the United States.

Now imagine that you just walked off the plane in an airport in the United States. You may have just spent five years in a refugee camp after being separated from your family during the war, watched family members die, left your home and belongings to seek a place of safety. You may speak only a minimal amount of English and your clothes represent your Muslim beliefs. For women, that would include being covered from head to toe. That would be a terrifying experience to have come from a completely different culture, and have left everything important to you behind. As a refugee, you would be carrying with you the effects of suffering, sadness, and grief.

Now imagine being in that position and immediately being expected to "snap out of it". Unfortunately, that is the attitude that is frequently portrayed to refugees. They may not feel welcome in their new environment based on ignorance and discrimination from individuals in the community who do not understand what it means to be a refugee.

For purposes of the reader to gain a better understanding of key concepts used throughout this research, two important terms are defined by UNHCR as follows:

- **Refugee** - "According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is a person who 'owning to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for

reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owning to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country", and continues to define as, "Most people can look to their own governments to protect their basic human rights and physical security. But in the case of refugees, the country of origin has proved itself unable or unwilling to protect those rights" (2001, UNHCR, www.unhcr.ch/un&ref/who/whois.htm).

- **Resettlement** - "Through resettlement, refugees gain legal protection - residency and often eventually citizenship - from governments who agree on a case-by-case basis, to open up their communities to new members". Further, it is defined as, "While the criteria which States use to determine eligibility for resettlement vary, like the numbers of refugees they accept, all programs recognize the range of compelling circumstances, including protections cases, family reunification, refugees with special needs such as women at-risk, handicapped refugees or serious medical cases" (2001, UNHCR, www.unhcr.ch/un&ref/who/whois.htm).

Background of the Issue

The number of Somali refugees living in Minnesota continues to increase. Throughout the literature, it is apparent that the Somali population has been greatly ignored. Out of the few Somalis whose stories have been documented, almost none of them include women. In order to gain a better understanding of who Somalis are as individuals, it is important to have an understanding of their history and culture. This includes knowledge on what it was like to live in their home country, war experiences, separation from family members, refugee camp experiences, and issues about resettlement into a new culture.

The circumstances that Somali refugees have survived need to be understood by those living in their resettled communities. Past war experiences and trauma endured by Somali refugees may continue to affect their current lives, relationships with family members, and unity within communities. For many of these individuals, the level of trust that they have with others needs to be regained prior to receiving support. The hurt and suffering which they have endured may take a long time to heal.

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this study is to enlighten community members, including those who may work with Somali members or interact with them in the community, about Somali refugees in their midst in an attempt to break down the barriers of ignorance. The experiences shared by Somali women will affect how they interact with community members, the services that they seek, and the needs that they have to live in the United States successfully. It is important for the history, culture, and personal stories of the Somali population to be shared with those who may interact with them. An increased amount of knowledge about the Somali population will lead others to understand and respect the cultural differences.

Research Questions

This qualitative study addresses the following research questions:

(1) What does it mean to leave one's home country and be resettled into a new country?

(2) What are the barriers that make resettlement into a new culture complex?

(3) What are the most significant coping skills needed to survive the refugee experience?

By addressing these research questions, this study plans to provide a greater understanding of what it means to be a refugee, a Somali woman, and to be resettled into a new country.

Summary

In summary, this research project attempts to demonstrate that the human experience shared by Somali refugee women is important. Their experiences are also important in teaching others about the significance of the suffering and trauma which they have endured, and how that may affect their transition process into a resettled community. The literature available about people from Somalia and their experiences is limited, as well as information about Somali refugees once they have resettled in the United States.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, I will define the question: What is the refugee experience for Somali women? Based on scholarly research, I will define the term refugee and what it means to them as individuals. Then I will describe the history of Somalia, and explain who Somali people are based on their culture and Islamic faith. The war experience will then be portrayed by two narrative examples of Somali women and their experiences during the civil war. That will be followed by the depiction of what it means for an individual to flee their home country in search of safety, and define the stresses related to the resettlement process. Gaps in the scholarly literature will also be discussed.

Results of Literature Review

Definition

To begin a discussion on the refugee experience of Somali women, the term "refugee" must first be defined. A refugee is someone who flees from their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of religious or political persecution, or to escape war. A refugee is forced to leave their country in search of safety. In conjunction with leaving one's homeland, they also leave behind their home, material possessions, and beloved family members due to their immense need to seek protection. Furthermore, many refugees carry with them vivid memories of their losses which may include their dignity and sense of trust due to enduring torture, or have witnessed the torture of loved ones, including rape, murder, or mutilation. Many refugees have lived through the trauma of war, imprisonment, torture, and abuse (International Institute of Boston, 1999). Many have been separated from their family members during wartime and may not even know if their family or loved ones are dead or alive.

The term "refugee" is frequently confused with the term "immigrant". The difference between the two is that an immigrant is choosing to leave one's country of origin for

various reasons which may include economic prosperity or a perceived improvement of current lifestyle. On the other hand, a refugee has no choice. A refugee may feel that their only means of survival is to flee their country of origin. Another differentiation is that an immigrant may choose to go back to their country of origin at will, even to visit and then return to their country of immigration. Whereas a refugee can not go back, at least not without risking their life and the opportunity of returning to their host country (Cole, 1982). Most refugees would probably state that they would prefer to be in their country of origin with their family members, culture and traditions if it was a safe option for them.

History of Somalia

Somalia has a history of political upheaval and turbulence both between clans and with other countries. In the early 1900's, Somalia was led by Siyyad Mohamed, a devout Muslim who trained himself through his travels about Somalia and other African countries, including Sudan and Kenya (Fitzgibbon, 1982). He outwardly opposed the Colonists and inspired Somalis to do the same. In 1904 he wrote to the Europeans, "If you want peace I also am content. But if you want peace, go from my country to your own!" (Fitzgibbon, 1982, p. 36). This saying is still in existence today and a proclamation for Somalis. Tension between Somalia and Ethiopia continued throughout many years, as well as struggles between Somalia and Europe. Northern Somalia was colonized by the British, and southern Somalia was colonized by the Italians. The friction increased when in 1945, Britain handed over the remaining hold of Western Somali to Ethiopia. Fitzgibbon states, "This was the final act of betrayal, and it is not at all surprising that today Somalis, without rancor, blame Britain for much of their troubles in that their land was illegally and secretly handed over to their traditional enemy" (Fitzgibbon, 1982, p. 42).

Somalia became independent in 1960, however that did not protect Somalis from further conflict. Ethiopia attacked Somalia in 1964 and the two countries continued to have conflicts. In 1977 the United States attempted to support Somalia by supplying them with arms, and to be-friend them against the Soviets. This agreement came to a halt once Somalis began to take back their territories in Ethiopia (Fitzgibbon, 1982).

In April 1980, The Bureau of Public Affairs came out with a report which stated that Somalia was accepting over 3,800 refugees a day of people fleeing from southern and eastern Ethiopia. At that time it was reported that another 600,000 - 700,000 people were refugees living outside the camps and fighting for survival (Bureau of Public Affairs, 1980). In March 1981, The Bureau of Public Affairs reported that the Somali government estimated over 1.3 million refugees were living in refugee camps, with an estimate of 40,000 to 70,000 per camp (Bureau of Public Affairs, 1981). This led to an obvious shortage of food, water, cooking fuel (wood), non-food supplies, means of getting supplies due to lack of vehicles, lack of mechanics, diminutive fuel, minimal medical attention, and crowded living conditions for the large number of refugees.

Somalia continued to have political unrest between clans, as well as economical and environmental problems due to the large influx of refugees from Ethiopia. In 1988 a revolt broke out against President Siad Barre and his administration. People began to leave Somalia in search of safety. The National Alliance for Multicultural Mental Health noted, "Clans became polarized and waged war against one another. By late 1991, Siad Barre was forced into exile; houses were being blasted by artillery; and neighbor fought against neighbor, friend against friend" (1999, p. 60). The civil war within Somalia was so disastrous that an estimated 400,000 people died from war violence, or the effects of war and lack of necessary shelter, food, etc. An estimated 45% of the population was forced to flee their homes and seek refuge either by relocating in Somalia or in a neighboring country.(The National Alliance for Multicultural Mental Health, 1999). Americans typically do not realize the prosperous lifestyles that many Somalis lived. It

was common for Somalis to live in large homes, communal-type, have cars, and servants. The wealthy Somalis were the first to come to the United States. Later followed the Somalis from meager backgrounds, who were typically the people who lived in rural settings (The National Alliance for Multicultural Mental Health, 1999).

Research of the history of Somalia is limited. This may be due to the lack of written information since Somalia did not have formal written language until 1972 (Fitzgibbon, 1982).

Who Are the Somali People?

Language

Somali culture is rich in historical custom and traditions. The Somalis speak the Somali language. However since northern Somalia was colonized by the British and southern Somalia colonized by Italy, some Somalis speak English, Italian, as well as Arabic. Somali had no written language prior to 1972, therefore the languages used by government officials and in education were English and Italian (The National Alliance for Multicultural Mental Health, 1999).

Islamic Faith

Religion is crucially important to the Somali people. Somalis are Sunni Muslims, and they have a strong belief in Islam. Somalis follow the written words of the Koran, which for many includes faithful praying at least five times a day. Daily life for Somalis is instructed through interpretation of the Koran. The woman dress in Islamic apparel, called the *guntiino*, covering their heads and their bodies. Somalis also follow the Islamic belief of not eating pork, which is stated in the Koran. Most Somalis follow the Islamic tradition of *Ramadan*, which is a month long devotion to the Islamic faith focusing on reconnecting one's self with Allah. During *Ramadan*, Muslims fast for the month then end with a three day celebration called *Id-al-fiter*. The celebration includes food, wearing

new clothes, and the exchange of gifts. Another religious celebration, the *Id-al-Adha,* is three months after *Ramadan* and coincides with the pilgrimage to Mecca, called the *Haj.* According to the Koran, all devout Muslims must pilgrimage to Mecca if they are able at least once in their lifetime (2001, Refugee Service Center, www. cal.org/rsc/somali/sfest.html).

Social Structure, Gender Roles and Family

Somalis belong to clans and sub-clan groups. They identify themselves based on their family name and clan affiliation. The strength of the clan provides protection and security, but is also a source of conflict. Clan politics in Somalia is the source of conflict based on disagreements over land, water, and political power. It has been stated (2001) that, "the ever-shifting world of clan politics is captured in a saying popular among nomads: My full brother and I are against my father, my father's household against my uncle's household, our two households (my uncle's and mine) against the rest of the immediate kin, the immediate kin against non-immediate members of my clan, my clan against other clans, and my nation against the world" (2001, Refugee Service Center, www. cal.org/rsc/somali/sfest.html).

Most of the gender roles in the Somali family are based on the Koran and follow the Islamic principles. Separation between men and women occurs during prayer time, and while worshipping at the mosque. Men are the decision makers in the family, however the official decisions are made by the oldest man in the family which may be the grandfather. Elders are highly respected, including both men and women. Traditionally, marriages have been arranged. However, that practice is gradually changing as love interests are discussed more openly now than in the past. Women are responsible for raising children, typically 5-10 children, and keeping the home in order. However, it is also common for Somali women to work outside of the home by raising produce, caring for livestock , or making items to sell or trade. Most Somali women have minimal

education based on the ideology that it is not proper for a Muslim girl to attend school with boys. Over the last wars, due to war, drought, and male migrations, the number of female-headed households has increased (2001, Refugee Service Center, www. cal.org/rsc/somali/sfest.html).

Somalis are proud of their family history and identify with their family lineage. The National Alliance for Multicultural Mental Health stated, "The Somali family is the source of security and identity. The importance of family is reflected in the common Somali question, 'Tol maa tahay?' (What is your lineage?). When Somalis meet, they ask, 'Whom are you from?' rather than 'Where are you from?' Genealogy is to Somalis what a birthplace is to Americans" (1999, p. 61).

In reviewing the research on Somalia and its people, it appears that the information is written from a familial perspective. There is minimal discussion about who the men and women are as individuals, outside of the family format. Research on the history of Somalia depicts the male leaders and their influence over their followers (Fitzgibbon, 1982). This may be based on the importance of the family lineage which was previously discussed and stated that Somalis define their identity by their family. Further, it may be in relation to the strong family beliefs held by the Islamic faith. Sherif (1999) describes the role of motherhood as defining the identity of Muslim women. As Muslims abide by the Koran, women are required to remain "in their place" as stated by Sherif. (McAdoo, 1999).

The War Experience

The year of 1991 was devastating for Somalia. It was a full year when the country's capital, Mogadishu, was overcome with violence. The civil war turned people against one another. No one knew who they could trust and most were living in fear. Families were separated due to their urgent need to leave the fighting and individuals survived violence on themselves, as well as their loved ones. People fled to the surrounding

countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti. Kenya, alone, had over 500,000 refugees enter into its country in search of protection (Bennett, 1995).

When looking at how the war affected people individually, The National Alliance for Multicultural Mental Health (1999) described a Somali woman's experience as follows, "One woman in Virginia tells of being at breakfast with her eight children in their beautiful Mogadishu beach house when, out of the blue, it was blown up. She regained consciousness in an enemy clan's hospital. She was able to escape from the hospital with three of her children by pretending to be a member of that clan. At one point soldiers dragged her behind a store and threatened to rape and murder her unless she gave them all her money. She described an arduous walk from Somalia to a refugee camp in Kenya, where she and the children remained for six years. She wept as she explained that she did not know what happened to her husband or her other five children" (p. 63).

Another tragic example portrayed by The National Alliance for Multicultural Mental Health (1999) states, "A beautiful young Somali woman with downcast eyes described being at home with her family when gunmen stormed into her house, murdered her father and brother in front of her, and then gang-raped her and her mother. The soldiers kept her captive for four years, treating her as a slave, making her sleep on the kitchen floor, humiliating her, and raping her repeatedly. The trauma of this experience was overwhelming, especially because she had been circumcised, as is the Somali custom, to preserve her purity until marriage. The experience was excruciating physically and devastating in terms of her religion and culture. Now she is considered unclean, she explained, and no one will want her as a wife. Her tragic experiences are ever-present in her mind and she has constant nightmares of the rapes. She 'spaces out' frequently, and relives her experiences while awake. Recently she screamed wildly for some minutes when a man touched her shoulder while she was shopping at the mall. His unanticipated voice and touch had served as a triggering incident for her; throwing her back into experiencing the gang-rape as if it were happening there and then".

The previous examples of the women's stories vividly explain to others what war trauma means to the individuals who survived such discourse. They are giving the Somali women a voice to share their stories. When sharing one's story, Cole (1992) noted in her own personal narrative that her experience with war trauma and uprootedness is "individual and unique" but she believes that it can be generalized to others who have also shared in the experience of "massive political dislocation" (p. 13). It is common for refugees to feel a sense of grief, depression and distress about their past, future and family members they left behind. The narrative approach informs us that when sharing one's story, the individual may become more aware of their experiences (Kelley, 1996).

The experience of war trauma may have a lasting effect on individuals. Individuals who have survived war have probably become more resilient based on their courage and endurance, both physically and emotionally. The lack of trust which developed among friends and neighbors, fear of loud noises from bombs or other war artillery, and fear of violent acts and government persecution continue to affect individuals even after they are out of immediate danger (Espin, 1992).

The civil war had a dramatic effect on individuals, families, and their communities. The breakdown in trust among one another and the shattering of relationships caused people to feel responsible only for themselves. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model explains what a traumatic impact this may have on environments with the notion that all levels of society are influencing one another (Ashford, Lecroy, & Lortie, 1997). Instead of the systems supporting one another, during war there is a breakdown between the relationship of each system including individual, family, community, and government.

Leaving One's Homeland

It is difficult to describe what many have endured as they left behind their home country. They were separated from family members, witnessed violence of horrible dimensions, then fled to an imagined secure and safe place. Frequently leaving with only

the clothes on their backs, minimal amounts of food, and children in tow. Despite leaving their place of origin, typically their situation did not greatly improve. Violent acts occurred in their search for safety, people died of malnutrition and disease, and the end result of a refugee camp was not what many had expected.

In the manual *Lessons from the Field: Issues and Resources in Refugee Mental Health*, it declared, "The camps in Kenya were often referred to as 'hell on earth' because of the torturous experiences refugees endured" (The National Alliance for Multicultural Mental Health, 1999, p. 64). Further, the manual described the camps as having a shortage of food, water, and fire wood. Sometimes the only available foods went against cultural beliefs, like offering pork which is forbidden in the Islamic religion. Furthermore, medical supplies were scarce and in short supply, fires burned down living spaces and killed children, people with disabilities, and elderly. Children's education was put on hold due to lack of educational services. Even though people believed that they were seeking refuge, violence and torture were still prevalent in the refugee camps. Women and young girls were often sexually assaulted and raped, and others were physically abused. Many felt distrust for the police because they were abusing their power and committing many of these crimes (The National Alliance for Multicultural Mental Health, 1999).

Another aspect of the refugee camps is that individuals from different clans had been placed together, causing tension and violence within the refugee camp. Many refugee camps attempted to separate clan members and families, although it was frequently not possible (Bennett, 1995). The experience of Somali refugees in Kenya was overwhelming for the refugees, but also for Kenya as a host country. The country was unable to successfully support and care for all of the refugees who had traveled to Kenya in search of refuge. The transition happened so quickly that the country was not able to prepare for the large number of camps needed, nor support refugees based on their economic and natural resources (Bennett, 1995).

Resettlement

The Refugee Perspective

After the trauma and survival of war, most refugees have experienced a long migration process. For many, their journey is still not complete. They have either lived in a refugee camp, temporarily relocated, lived in various locations in search of safety, or they may have sought refuge in a new location where they plan to stay. Regardless of the situation, all refugees need to regain their lives in their new environment. Bernier (1992) stated that the losses endured by refugees is similar to that of "bereavement". Refugees need to grieve the loss or separation of family members, and the loss of their country. They are abruptly introduced to their new culture, supported by strangers who attempt to meet their basic needs of housing, clothing, and food. However, there is not an opportunity for them to grieve for their losses because of their imminent need for survival.

A common theme described in the research on refugee resettlement is best described as "culture shock" (Kelley, 1992). Donnelly (1994) notes in her book entitled, *Changing Lives of Refugee Hmong Women,* the attention paid to different styles of communication between Americans and Hmong refugees. I believe it may be relevant to use this illustration for cultural differences, in general. For instance, in her writing she referred to the trust that Hmong refugees had when an American said "See you later" or "We'll do it next week" (Donnelly, 1994, p. 72). In the American culture it is common for people to use common phrases that do not hold a lot of truth. However, in other countries these words are taken literally and mistrust occurs when there is no follow-through. Kelley (1992) defines racism and language barriers also as difficult struggles that refugees encounter.

The experiences that refugees have faced forced them to be adaptable (Cole, 1992). In order for them to have survived war, the journey to a refugee camp, continued existence while living in a camp, and then the courage and determination to move on with their lives in a new country speaks to the resilience of these people. Unfortunately, due to the

trauma war survivors have endured, it is difficult for them to regain their sense of trust in others. This inability is in relation to the refugees "vulnerability" and "protective factors" as noted by Silove and Franzcp (1999) when describing the individual's personal response to war trauma. Research shows that it is difficult for war trauma survivors to overcome the past and the pain they endured, if it is even possible. Refugees living in resettled communities need to develop a support system, although their war experiences may have caused them to have a mistrust for others in their community. Robertson (1999) shares an example of such a situation, "An elderly man, for example, may find himself living in a high-rise, next door to a man from the clan that tortured him and murdered his family. Though the men never met in their home country, and though both are desperately lonely and isolated, their history and fears preclude a friendship" (The National Alliance for Multicultural Mental Health, 1999, p. 54).

The family systems approach may be a helpful tool to increase one's understanding of the refugee experience. The knowledge that individuals are separated from family members, communities, and their home country depicts the lack of social support refugees must feel as they are living in a new country. It may also be difficult for refugees to feel that they must forget their culture and their past in order to adapt to American society. Eisenbruch (1999) used an empirical study that compared cultural bereavement between two different cultural groups, Cambodians living in Australia and Cambodians living in the United States. This study showed that family members living in Australia had less pressure to accommodate to the cultural norms in Australia than the individuals living in the United States. It appears important for refugees to be supported in maintaining their sense of identity with their home country, cultural traditions, and family values in order to keep their personal sense of identity.

How Communities Can Support Refugees

It would be beneficial to our society if communities had a better understanding of those who live within the community. War and the traumas associated with it, including torture, greatly affect communities where refugees are resettled. The grief, mistrust, and depression associated with the refugee experience may make it difficult for them to adapt to their new surroundings. If communities have an understanding of the experiences that survivors of war have endured, there would apt to be more empathy and support for the refugees.

Kelley (1992) based an empirical study on the use of an integrated family systems approach that applied to mental health services for Southeast Asians. She found that use of this model was successful on three levels which included: Consulting with agencies who supported the Southeast Asian population, the training of students for this work, and providing necessary clinical interventions to the refugees. An important explanation that Kelley gave for its appropriateness for working with refugees was based on the model as process orientated, which allowed time for the refugees to develop trust. Furthermore, the integrated systems approach was adaptable to the specific culture. There were no systematic written assessments or tests that the refugee was required to complete. Rather the model was able to use human behavior to define the suffering that the refugees endured as creating their current system.

Personal Accounts

The following information is based on personal accounts of living in Somalia during the war, as well as specific stories pertaining to war. This information is not based on scholarly research, rather personal accounts and observations. This has been added to this literature review to add a biographical and personal aspect to the experience of living in Somalia.

In the book, Aman: The Story of a Somali Girl, Aman discusses the relevance of her tribe and the strength that she had in knowing that she was a part of a larger group. She said, "I felt very strong, like a lion, because of the tribe I was and who I was and what I had been through. Everyone else's tribe seemed lower to me than my tribe" (Barnes & Boddy, 1995, p. 160). This supports the discussion earlier in this chapter about clans and the conflict involved between them. They appear to have an egocentric view of themselves, while the others are considered with less respect. Her account of the government take-over is as follows, "Around four or five in the morning we heard a big noise I had never heard before, like an earthquake. The whole house was shaking. It was the noise of the military tanks going by outside to arrest the ministers. In the middle of the night, Siyaad Barre, a young man who was in the military, had taken over the country" (Barnes & Boddy, 1995, p. 246). She went on to say, "I knew the military were very bad. Even the police were bad" (Barnes & Boddy, 1995, p.247). There was a sense of distrust in her words about the government, and in regard to how the change in government would impact her future.

The book, Desert Flower, followed a young girl as she left her family and nomad lifestyle, searched for relatives to live with in the city, moved to London, then became a famous model in London and New York. Her story is important because she shared her experience as a young girl who was circumcised, and nearly died due to complications. Further, she explained her personal reaction to when her father had arranged a marriage for her when she was about thirteen years old. He was going to receive five camels for her marriage. Instead, she fled from her family, alone, in the middle of the night. This is how she described her journey, "my bowlegs carried me thousands of miles across the desert , and my slow undulating walk is the walk of an African woman; it speaks of my heritage" (Dirie & Miller, 1998, p. 174). The author reflected about her life in Somalia as follows: "Another benefit of growing up in Africa was that we were part of nature, pure life - not some artificial substitute on television where I'm watching *other* people live

life. From the beginning, I had the instinct for survival; I learned joy and pain at the same time. I learned that happiness is not what you have, because I never had anything, and I was happy" (Dirie & Miller, 1998, p. 222). The previous statement describes the basis for the coping skills that attribute to survival through the experience of leaving one's homeland and resettling into an unfamiliar environment.

Journalist, Scott Peterson, described his observations of Somalia during the war in his book entitled, Me against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan, and Rwanda. He stated, "The dusty town was ugly, a terrible manifestation of all that had gone wrong in Somalia, with the tragic marriage of guns and hunger. It was here that the gulf was widest between those who shouldn't die but would, and those with guns who wouldn't. The dead old man in front of the hospital, waiting for burial until the looting was done; the threats against relief workers; the chronic disrespect that underscored the moral erosion of all that was good in Somalia. It was all here..." (Peterson, 2000, p. 49). His interpretation of Somalia sadly exhibits a sense of loss for the good in the country that has disappeared.

Bowden (2000) also described scenes of the city from a war perspective. When discussing the fighter planes that flew overhead, he said, "They flew in groups, at all hours of day and night, swooping down so low they destroyed whole neighborhoods, blew down market stalls, and terrorized cattle. Women walking down the streets would have their colorful robes blown off. Some infants torn from their arms by the powerful updraft. On one raid, a mother screamed frantically in flex cuffs for nearly a half hour before a translator arrived to listen and to explain that her infant had been blown down the road by the landing helicopters" (Bowden, 2000, p. 75). This quotation sheds insight on the realities of the distress for the Somali people. They were indeed caught in the middle of the war, chaos, and violence around them.

Research Limitations

The success of an integrated systems approach appears beneficial to increase one's understanding of the refugee experience. In an organized manner, it allows others to conceptualize the depth of the losses encountered by refugees. Further, the model can be culturally sensitive based on the use of general information, such as family members, community, and other support systems, to develop the refugee's story. There is limited research available on other successes of this model. However, it is problem focused which tends to be less intrusive, and respectful of the individual's need for privacy due to the possibility of a general mistrust due to war trauma (Kelley, 1992).

This researcher found minimal research information on the history of Somalia, which may be in relation to the country not having a written language until 1972 (Fitzgibbon, 1982). Further, there is a lack of information about who the Somali people are, except in describing them based on their Islamic faith and their diligence in following their interpretation of the Koran.

The war experience was explained through the use of narrative depiction's from war survivors. Their stories are powerful and describe the experiences of war through their personal experiences. It may be helpful for others to hear their experiences in order to identify war with individual people, and to realize how their lives were dramatically affected and changed. There was insufficient research on the Somali war experience to gather more data and narrative experiences. Furthermore, some readers may feel that only two narratives derived from Somali women and their experiences do not accurately depict a generalizable description of the Somali experience. It is not intended to be generalizable, although many of the details and post-traumatic experiences have been identified by other war survivors (Silove & Franzcp, 1999).

Overall, the scholarly research inadequately contains information on Somalia. On a broader level, a researcher is able to gain an increased knowledge on the refugee experience, post traumatic stress related to traumatic events, and a limited amount of

information about supporting and caring for refugees once they are resettled. Women and their refugee experiences were not well represented in the research.

Summary

This literature review attempted to define the question: What is the refugee experience for Somali women? There is a lack of scholarly research in this area, both about the civil war in Somalia and on women and their experiences. The Somali identity is directly related to their family lineage and Islamic faith. Scholarly research is available to explain who the Somali people are in terms of language, Islamic faith, social structure, gender roles and family. Scholarly research is also available to inform others of the process that a refugee goes through in regard to surviving in the midst of war, leaving one's homeland, and resettlement into an unfamiliar culture. There are a few written personal accounts available that share the personal aspects of living in Somalia during the war, as well as personal accounts that describe the war. The intent of this research project is to provide insight on the personal aspect of being a female Somali refugee.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this theoretical framework, I plan to address the relevant use of both ecological systems theory and cognitive theory as a guide in understanding the refugee experience, specifically related to Somali women and their resettlement process in Minnesota. As an overview, this chapter describes both theories, the relevance of ecological systems theory and cognitive theory in social work, and incorporates how both theories may explain some of the complex issues related to the refugee experience.

Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological systems theory incorporates the individual, group, family, community, institutions, class, and culture (Turner, 1996). The theory informs us of the relevance between the relationships in the different areas in one's life, and how those areas are connected. Essentially, ecological systems theory identifies how one aspect of an individual's life may impact other aspects. Ashford, Lecroy, and Lortie (1997) discuss the ecological systems approach as a connection between one's self and their environment. Specifically, as a "reciprocal transaction" that takes place between individuals and their environment (p. 87). One's experiences, environment, and relationships will shape who they are and how they interact with others. The theory also explains that stress and difficulties related to resettlement into an unfamiliar country, based on the loss of a familiar support system, and that it will impact individual's in their daily activity.

Ashford, Lecroy, and Lortie (1997) defined the four layers of the ecological systems theory as follows:

Microsystems - This level includes any "face-to-face" contact with an individual. It also includes experiences that occur at home, within the family relationship.

Mesosystem - This level includes close social contact, including day care, school, church, recreation, and community resources. It includes relationships that daily touch and impact an individual.

Exosystem - This level includes institutions that do not directly relate to one's life, but have an impact on it. For instance, government and policies.

Macrosystem - This level supports the larger sub-cultural and cultural contexts in which the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem are located. The macro-system includes physical, social, cultural, and political structures of the larger society.

(Ashford, Lecroy, & Lortie, 1997, p. 86).

Ecological Systems Theory in Social Work

Use of ecological systems theory in social work is based on the interactions between the person, the situation, and the environment. Turner (1996) explained the importance of knowledge based on the ecological systems theory, "Knowledge about actual situations that an individual has encountered dealing with the accompanying physical, social, and cultural macro environments, will help the social worker to understand behavior at different stages of development" (Turner, 1996, p. 608). Social workers can utilize this model to gain a better understanding of a client's current situation to gain an understanding of how it may be impacted by the environment.

Cognitive Theory

One of the theoretical frameworks that guides this research is cognitive theory. Cognitive theory is based on the idea that one's behavior is shaped by their belief about self, expectations of self, and their perception of the world. The origin of these thoughts are viewed in research as related to one's own personal experiences. Physical and environmental factors influence human behavior. However, many cognitive theorists

believe that people are capable of changing their environmental factors, internal and external. Cognitive theory informs us that each individual will interpret situations or events differently based on diverse belief systems, values, attitudes, and perception of self (Turner, 1996). How an individual defines self and the world around them will have an effect on their human relationships, gender roles, and feeling of power over their lives, others, and the environment (Hepworth, Rooney, & Larsen, 1997).

The cognitive theory derived, in part, from the psychoanalytical thinking of Sigmund Freud. Alfred Adler is believed to be the first cognitive therapist. He based the theory on his belief that one's personality should be viewed as whole, and not divided into the categories of id, ego, and super-ego as defined by Freud. Adler worked with Freud, however he did not agree with elements in the psychoanalytical model. He believed that people are motivated by human and social drives, rather than sexual drives as believed by Freud (Turner, 1996).

According to cognitive theory, behavior is affected by one's thought patterns, beliefs, and attitudes. These thoughts may be distorted based on an individual's perception of self and the world around them. Through exploration, it is often revealed that individuals have an imprecise definition of their identity, their perceptions may have led them to interpret situations incorrectly, and they may have a "dysfunctional pattern of thought" (Hepworth, Rooney, & Larsen, 1997, p. 393). The individuals may feel inundated with feelings related to low-self worth which then affects their ability to function in common situations (Hepworth, Rooney, & Larsen, 1997).

Cognitive Theory in Social Work

Turner (1996) defines the goal of cognitive therapy as, "to help the client identify, challenge, and change the misconceptions, faulty beliefs, disturbed thinking, and irrational self-talk that create dysfunctional feelings and behavior" (Turner, 1999, p. 102).

The following is an excerpt summarized by Judy Beck on ten constructive beliefs on the effective use of cognitive treatment in social work:

- Treatment is adaptable and changes to meet the needs of the client and their problems in a cognitive format.
- Treatment is based on a trusted therapeutic relationship.
- The client must be willing to problem-solve and be an active participant in the treatment process.
- Treatment is "problem focused" and "goal orientated".
- Treatment focuses on the client's current life-situation.
- Treatment is intended to teach the client to problem-solve.
- If applicable, treatment attempts to be time limited.
- The interview time with clients is structured.
- Treatment teaches clients to "identify, evaluate, and respond effectively to dysfunctional thoughts and beliefs".

Treatment attempts to change the client's perception, thoughts, and behavior by using various techniques.

(Turner, 1996, p. 102).

Research Problem

The research problem that I am addressing is that there is a lack of knowledge about refugee women, specifically Somali women, who have resettled in Minnesota. This is a crucial topic due to the large number of Somali refugees now living in Minnesota. Families, communities, social service providers, and medical support do not have adequate knowledge about war trauma, the effects of torture on communities, or on the cultural background of the refugees. The lack of knowledge affects the quality of services that refugees receive when they are resettled in new communities. The history and war

trauma that refugees have survived continues to affect them as they begin to regain their identity in their unfamiliar environment.

Cognitive approach informs us that one's past experiences may define how a refugee views their life situation, including past, present, and future. The experience of war trauma and survival may leave a refugee with a distorted perception of reality. This information may be shared through a treatment process, or even in the way one shares their personal story. When working with a survivor of war trauma, it is important to consciously think about the experiences one has endured, and how that may affect their thoughts, feelings, and behavior (Turner, 1996).

An advantage to the use of cognitive theory with refugees is that it can be a culturally sensitive technique. The approach values building trust with the client. Trust is a complex component for many refugees who have survived war trauma, especially in the Somali community. The civil war in Somalia greatly broke down the trust as clans fought against clans, and friends fought against friends. Cognitive approach attempts to identify one's perception of self and define how that may be correlated with past experiences. By understanding how one views the world, they may be able to understand that trust can be regained. Once the individual has an understanding of their own personal thought process, they may be empowered to change their thoughts and behavior.

Ecological systems theory informs us that knowledge of an individual's microsystem, mesosytem, exosytem, and macrosytem can impact their current behavior. For Somali refugees who have endured the war, a torn and corrupt government, leaving their homeland and loved ones, resettling into an unfamiliar culture may be difficult. They may have a lack of trust for government based on their past experiences. They may also have been separated from their microsystem of family members. The system supports that they have been accustomed to have changed. Language, culture, knowledge of the government system, and the environment in which they are familiar has changed.

They now need to develop trust and relationships and begin to rebuild their system of support.

Cognitive approach and ecological systems theory have been used as a guideline to gain a better understanding of the refuge experience. The three Somali refugee women that were interviewed shared their stories based on their perception of what happened. Cognitive approach leads us to believe that one's past experiences may define how a refugee views their current situation, and how they recall the past events. Ecological systems theory aims to give us a better understanding of how one's environment and social supports affect the personal aspect of leaving one's homeland and loved ones and help us identify the barriers involved in adapting to a new culture. Overall, ecological systems theory incorporates the use of systems to identify personal strengths and coping skills (Turner, 1996).

Summary

Ecological systems theory identifies the four basic systems that impact an individual including: microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, and macrosystem. The relationship between the systems has an impact an individual's current ability to function daily. Cognitive theory informs us that individuals are affected by past experiences which distort one's perception of thoughts, feelings and behavior (Turner, 1996). It may be useful when attempting to gain a greater understanding of the refugee experience of war trauma and resettlement. Cognitive theory supports that individuals are affected by their own personal experiences which occurred in the past. However, the past affects the present in one's view of self, and the world around them. Both ecological systems theory and cognitive theory guide us in gaining a better understanding of the refugee experience, based on the refugee's perception of the experience and on the change in system supports that the refugees have encountered.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

In this methodology, I described the research design and methodology implemented for the research on the refugee experience for Somali women. This chapter addresses the methodology of this project including a statement of the research questions, description of the research design, definitions of key concepts, study population, sample, measurement issues, data collection and analysis, and the plan of protection of human subjects.

Research Questions

This study focuses on the refugee experience for Somali women. An interview process was used to understand the experience of women in an attempt to answer the following questions.

(1) What does it mean to leave one's home country and be resettled into a new country?

(2) What are the barriers that make resettlement into a new culture complex?

(3) What are the most significant coping skills needed to survive the refugee experience?

Research Design

This study applied an exploratory and cross-sectional design using qualitative methods by interviewing Somali women who are currently living in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I used the same list of questions as a guide in each of the interviews. The purpose of prepared questions was intended to prompt the participants on the same topics and to gain some consistency among all of the interviews. However, each interview was lead in different directions based on the participant and the areas that she wanted to discuss, and based on her different experiences. The overall outcome in the interview process was to determine common themes of topics in all of the interviews.

By interviewing Somali refugee women I attempted to gain a better understanding of the refugee experience for women, including the effects of leaving one's homeland and

resettling into a new country. Qualitative methods allow for the information gathered to have a richer meaning and to gain a deeper understanding of refugees as individuals.

Definitions of Key Concepts

The terms below were operationalized in the screening process by asking the female participants prior to the interviews if their home country was Somalia, if they came to the United States with refugee status, and if they were between the ages of 18 and 50 (Screening Form, Appendix C).

Somali - Individuals from the country of Somalia, located in the northeast corner of Africa.

Women - Individuals of the female gender. In this study, it refers to women between the ages of 18 and 50.

Refugee - "According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is a person who 'owning to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owning to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (2001, UNHCR, www.unhcr.ch/un&ref/who/whois.htm).

Experience - "The act of living through an event" according to Webster's New World Dictionary (1987, p. 216).

Significant - "Full of meaning" or "important" according to Webster's New World Dictionary (1987, p. 555).

Resettlement - When an individual gains "legal protection - residency and often eventually citizenship - from governments who agree, on a case-by-case basis to open up their communities to new members" (2001, UNHCR, www.unhcr.ch/un&ref/who/whois.htm).

Study Population

The focus of this study is to gain an increased understanding of the Somali women refugee experience and to explore what factors were involved in surviving the refugee experience. The study also focuses on the effects of trauma on individuals as they are relocated into communities within the United States, specifically in Minnesota. Further, this researcher interviewed the participants in relation to the resettlement process and the barriers that they have faced as they resettled into their communities.

The study population includes women between the ages of 18 and 50. The study population includes women who are originally from Somalia, Africa and who have lived in the United States for a minimum of two years.

Sample

The sample was selected from a Somali women's support group through the use of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows for selection of a sample projected to yield a fairly accurate representation of the subjects studied (Rubin & Babbie, 1997). The use of purposive sampling allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of a group or phenomenon that exhibits a deeper understanding and meaning to the experiences of the participants.

I attended one of the Somali women's support group meetings and shared information on my research project with potential participants. I then gave each woman a hand-out that explained the research project and described the goal and purpose of the study. Individuals who were interested in participating in the research were able to contact me by a telephone number that I included on the initial hand-out. When potential participants called, I reviewed the requirements of the study candidates with them. If they met the criteria of age, country of origin, length of time in the United States, and refugee status, I scheduled an interview time with them. Then I obtained valuable information from the participants through a qualitative interview process.

Data Collection

Data was collected by conducting an in-depth interview with each participant. Interview questions were prepared in advance, and used in an interview guide with each participant. The interview questions consisted of thirteen open-ended questions intended to probe the participants to explore their experiences and to share their stories. The interviews occurred in a location chosen by each participant where they felt comfortable.

Measurement Issues

When attempting to understand one's experience of an event, according to qualitative research, the participant's description is subjective (Rubin & Babbie, 1997). In order to gain the most consistent response, the participants were each asked the same questions. However, the data gathered is different based on each individual's personal experience. The array of data gathered is a strength of qualitative research since it adds a deeper meaning and understanding to personal experiences. The use of a research guide attempted to minimize researcher bias by focusing on the relevant questions.

Once the interviews were completed and the data transcribed, data analysis was used to organize the information. I went back to one participant for further clarification of the research data to ensure validity. I wanted to ensure that the data collected accurately reflected the intent of the participant, and that I had interpreted it correctly (Rubbin & Babbie, 1997). The other two interviews were clear and I was able to assess the data based on the information shared in the interview process. However, it is possible that random error may have occurred based on the language difference between myself and the participant. At times, I may have unintentionally altered the participant's response by assisting in translating in order for me to gain a better understanding of their response (Rubbin & Babbie, 1997). I then organized the information from all three interviews and identified themes that either stood out as important, or common themes that were

addressed in all of the interviews. Reliability was assessed by having my fellow students review the themes and interpretations of the data.

Data Analysis Procedures

After the interviews were completed, I transcribed the data based on the audiotapes and/or written notes of the interview. The data was then examined to identify themes, concepts, and patterns in order to compile it in a systematic manner. Once organized, I attempted to interpret the data in a way that made sense and portrayed an accurate depiction of the women's experiences. During this process, the gathered information was brought back to one of the participants to review for accuracy.

The overall goal of this research was to gain a better understanding of the Somali refugee women's experiences of leaving a war-torn country and resettling into a new community in the United States. I referred back to my research questions while compiling the data to ensure accuracy of my interpretations. Information on the Somali women's refugee experience will enlighten community members about the reality of these individual's struggles. Furthermore, I suspect it will portray the strengths of these women to survive and begin their lives anew in an unfamiliar country.

Protection of Human Subjects

I submitted an application to the Augsburg Institutional Review Board prior to beginning this research project and personal interviews. I produced a written consent form for each of the participants which identified their rights in the research process, as well as the possible risks involved. I was aware that discussing the experiences of the past could trigger trauma for the participants based on the war trauma that they have already experienced. I gave each of the women a list of names and phone numbers of agencies that they could contact if they were in need of support, specifically hospitals and social service agencies. I explained clearly at the beginning of the interview process that

they could end the interview at any time and I observed for signs of discomfort. I also gave each of them a $20.00 honorarium prior to starting the interview process. My intent was to learn from the women, I did not want to make them feel vulnerable.

Prior to the interview process, I confirmed that each participant met the appropriate requirements for this research study. Each participant was required to sign a consent form. The consent form explained the purpose of the study, confidentiality, procedures, risks and benefits to their participation in the study, use of a translator if necessary and voluntary participation. I assured each participant that they may end the interview at any time. The consent form also addressed the participant's approval for use of their words in the written works of this study, and their consent for the interview to be audio taped. One participant chose to not have the interview audiotaped. The consent form also requested a follow-up meeting with each participant to review the validity of the gathered data, if necessary. Participants received a copy of the consent form.

Summary

This chapter discussed the research design and methodology used in this research project focusing on the refugee experiences of Somali women. Through use of qualitative methods and in-depth interviews, I gained a deeper understanding of the female refugee experience. Specifically, the refugee experience for Somali women who have been resettled in the United States. This research methodology examined pertinent information including: statement of research questions, research design, definitions of key concepts, study population, sample, measurement issues, data collection and analysis, and the plan for protection of human subjects.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter describes the data collected through personal interviews with three Somali women, who came to the United States as refugees, to answer the following research questions:

(1) What does it mean to leave one's home country and be resettled into a new country?

(2) What are the barriers that make resettlement into a new culture complex?

(3) What are the most significant coping skills needed to survive the refugee experience?

The research questions will be answered throughout this chapter, as the data has been organized according to relevant themes present in the interviews. First is a description of the women participants. Secondly, the remaining chapter highlights the themes present in the interviews based on the chronological order of events in their lives.

The Women Who Shared Their Stories

The three women who participated in this research project identified Somalia as their homeland. They all met the requirements to participate in this research project, including: the participant must speak English, have lived in the United States for at least two years, be between the ages of 18 and 50, and have come to the United States with refugee status. The following information is a specific description of each woman who was gracious enough to share her story:

> **Participant 1:** She is a thirty-two year old woman dressed in the traditional Islamic attire, with a beautiful blue scarf wrapped around her head. She spoke English well. Her three year old daughter was with her while her seven year old son was at school during the interview. She is currently separated from her husband, as she awaits the finality of their divorce. She lives with her two children and niece. She has been involved with her husband, in an abusive

relationship, for the past eight years. She met him in a mid-eastern state when she first moved to the United States. He then followed her to Minnesota. He is also from Somalia. They knew each other for two weeks, then were married. She was unaware that he was an alcoholic at the time of their marriage. She had down-cast eyes and a look of sadness throughout the interview as she discussed her family and friends who still live in Somalia, or who have been killed. However, she portrayed a sense of strength and courage as she discussed the continued problems with her husband and her ability to now be independent in an unfamiliar environment.

Participant 2: She is a thirty-two year old woman, with a new-born baby. She also wore the traditional Islamic wear, covered from head-to-foot. She is separated from her husband and their divorce will be final in two months. She lives in an apartment with other family members. Both her mother and father were killed in Somali when she was young. She was then separated from her older siblings and raised by her aunt. She spoke with broken-English and appeared self-conscious about her English-speaking abilities. She spoke fondly about living in the city in Mogadishu, Somalia. She described her youth growing up in the city with excitement. She portrayed a positive depiction of what Somalia was like before the war. However, when she spoke of the war and violence, she had an obvious look of fear in her eyes. She continued to make the hand-motion of a gun shooting throughout the interview as she explained her perception of the war. She has lived in two eastern states and now resides in Minnesota.

Participant 3: She is a lovely woman of fifty years old. She came to the interview wearing the traditional Islamic dress, fully colored in a brilliant bright orange. Her hands were beautifully decorated with henna. She explained this to me as a tradition for Somali women, especially for special occasions. Her fingernails were covered with henna, which looked like a yellow staining over the nails. She described that since the Islamic religion prohibits the use of fingernail polish, Somali women use Henna to decorate themselves with the natural substance. Her hands were also decorated in a unique pattern of dots. This woman was very kind and sincere in answering the interview questions. She had a smile on her face throughout most of the interview. She currently lives in an apartment with her husband and two children. Her children were young when they moved to the United States. Minnesota is their first, and only, location to live in the United States.

Findings in response to research question #1...

What does it mean to leave one's home country and be resettled into a new country?

Before the War: A Good Life in Somalia

As the women were sharing their stories, it seemed important for all of them to talk about the Somalia that they remembered from their childhood, or from before the war. The women all said that they would like to go back to their homeland, either to visit their family and friends or to live. All three of the women were from the city, Mogadishu.

The time prior to war in Somalia was described as, "I go to school, I go to the movies, theater, everywhere. When school closed, I go on vacation. When school open, I go to the zoo. Before guns, before civil war, everything was good". Another woman described her experience as, "When I used to live in Somalia, I feel happy, comfortable,

and I didn't have any worries". She went on to say, "The best things were that I was young, I work myself, and I do whatever I want to do and feel happy with it". The last woman stated, "The most that I remember is my homeland, my family, and I remember my friends". This was a time of reflection for the women of both fond memories and grief over their losses.

Living in the Midst of War: Violence

The violence that was observed by these women during the war was described in vivid details, and it was difficult for two of the women to discuss. The other woman acknowledged the violence and witnessed horrid acts upon others, but noted, "Some people were targeted for violence, some were not. Some tribes were targeted and they were killed. My tribe was not targeted. It first started by killing other people". She continued by stating, "There was a lot of people who were fighting to get power for the government. We were ordinary people stuck in the middle".

The other two who were visibly upset when discussing the war both described similar situations. The examples they both gave were related to the great deal of theft, in relation to violence. Their stories relay that it was common for people to wait outside of the grocery store and steal money from others. It was believed that if you were in the store, you had money. People would wait outside of the store, frequently with guns, and harass people who came out. One of the women said that even if a person gave their money to the man with the gun, they were still shot on occasion. She stated, "Six times I see people shot for no reason, no reason. If they give money they say just leave my life alone, they didn't listen. They got money, then they shoot. I don't understand. If you see something that bad, sometimes I cry myself". She also mentioned that there was a lot of yelling and fighting in many places that she went.

Another woman described the violence that she witnessed, "I leave my home, it was scary. One of my friends died and I see it with my own eyes because they shoot him.

Some of my neighbors shot him. Every time you see something bad, you don't believe it. I didn't believe it that day until I saw it with my own eyes".

One of the women described her brother's death. It was a similar situation as described above. He came out of a store and there were men waiting for him. They knew that he had a car and assumed that he had money. They took his money, then made him go and get his car. Then they shot him. She continued to say, "I know of people that were killed all over". It was discussed that many people had guns. When walking down the street, she saw people with guns. The same woman described the problem of theft as people would come into a house with a gun, and take over the home. The family would then have to leave and move somewhere else, or they were killed.

Another family tragedy was also illustrated. By the time this example happened, the woman had left her family and she heard the following details from her mother. This is a description of her father's death. It began because her sister ran a business and was believed to have money. Men, from the same tribe, came into her parent's house looking for her sister. Her father said he did not know where she was. They thought that he was lying to protect her, even though he really did not know of her location. They beat him for an extended amount of time and he then died of a heart attack.

Overall, the notion of fear was evident throughout the interviews. The women left their families, friends, homes, and familiar surroundings because they were frightened for their lives. It was said, "We were so scared. They were shooting each other because they didn't ask who you were - they just shot. We were running for our lives".

Family Separation: Grief

Grief over the losses that the women endured was a common theme throughout the interviews. Their lives have been completely uprooted away from all that was familiar to them. All three of the women have had family members and friends murdered, witnessed violence and have had to deal with the loss of those individuals.

They were saddened by the family and friends that they left behind. Even though their family members may still be alive, they have been separated. In some cases, they are unsure if their loved ones are dead or alive.

When discussing family separation, one woman said, "I was the only one in my family that tried to leave. My mom wanted me to stay with her but I told her that I can't. If I stay I feel that I am not safe. My mom and dad both wanted me to stay, but my mom said that if I don't feel well here then I should go. My mom wanted to go also sometimes, but my dad was determined to stay with his house. She stayed with him". Her mother still lives in Somalia and her father has since died there.

Another woman explained her difficult decision to leave, "My daddy didn't want me to leave. He wanted me to stay with him. The problem was that I couldn't stay. We have a house and someone put a bomb on the house, but my daddy he didn't care because it was his house. I tell him that I am scared. One house blew up. I tell him that it is dangerous and I am scared. He says that he is not moving away from his house". She said that her mother was supportive of her going, and even gave her money. She said, "My mom she work and support our family. She didn't have much money, no savings. She go everyday working while my daddy he go to school and not do anything. He said that everybody can go, but he's staying".

The decision to leave was difficult for all of them. They left because they feared for their lives, were scared of the fighting, and felt they could not survive under such circumstances. In one situation, everything had been taken from the woman and her family and they left in search of meeting their basic needs of food, shelter, and safety.

In Search of Safety: Heading to a Refugee Camp

Each of the women's stories were different in the manner that they left Somalia. One woman went to Nairobi, Kenya . She was twenty-one years old and traveled out of Somalia alone on a bus. Once in Kenya, she began searching for familiar people,

relatives, friends, and old neighbors. She found a friend of hers and together they traveled to the refugee camp in Mombassa, Kenya. She said that they did not have enough money to pay for rent in Nairobi, nor for food. Then they decided to go to the refugee camp. Another woman and her family, walked and took a bus that brought them to a refugee camp in Kenya.

The third woman interviewed went by bus, with relatives, to Kenya, and then to a refugee camp in Fiji. She said that they walked some, and then waited a long time for the bus. The bus traveled all around bringing people to different refugee camps. Once on the bus, it was crowded and people were carrying all of their personal belongings with them. She traveled with a large group which made it difficult because they wanted to all travel together.

The process to leave Somalia to get to Kenya sometimes took a long time depending on the bus. It was also described as unsafe because there was still war going on around them as they traveled. People were stealing from one another. When traveling, people did not know who you were, or from what tribe you came. Sometimes people shot one another because they were fearful and did not trust other people.

Life in the Refugee Camp

Life in the refugee camp was still not a safe place to be. People lived in close quarters, with a number of people in each tent. People stole from one another, and there were occasional fires in the camps that killed people. It was described that each person was either assigned a tent, given one for a large family, or left to fend for themselves and find a place to sleep. They were given a card to get food, although sometimes there was no food for anyone in the camps. One woman explained that sometimes they would say that the food would come in fifteen days, and they did not receive it for a month. The camp ran out of food.

One woman explained her feeling on being a refugee as follows: " Refugee is when you come to camp and you don't have anything. You come to camp with no money, food, or house. I think that's a refugee; when you left everything behind. You don't have anything, nothing. Some people they leave children and only parent come and when you ask how they are doing, they not okay because they don't have any of their children. You don't have a home, you take a bus, you don't have anyplace to go. The parent sometimes go alone. When I go, people ask me where my parents are. I say that I left them behind".

Some people who lived in the refugee camp had their own small businesses. They would sell things to make money for their family. Some people worked in the camps, either in some type of school, administrative job, or other work to help the camp officials. If an individual had a job, they could feed their families when the camp ran out of food. Many others in the camps received money from relatives, many who lived in the United States. The woman interviewed said that she had her own business. She walked downtown and purchased pasta for spaghetti, then came back to the refugee camp and sold it for an increased price. This helped her family buy oil, salt and bread.

Another woman described the feeling of fear and violence, especially with the soldiers. She described that there were soldiers everywhere, many with guns. As a person walked out of the refugee camp to go downtown, the soldiers would frequently harass them. They would want the individual's money. She explained, "There were soldiers on street, in grocery store, they take your money. I say I'm from the refugee camp and they say give me your money. When you give them your money, they take it. Then they say where is your document. I say it is in the refugee camp. They say again they need more money or they will shoot". The soldiers would continue to harass people who were in the refugee camps by threatening their friends and family members if they were not given money.

Another aspect to life in the refugee camp was the rapid spread of malaria. One woman described that when it rained, everything was wet and damp and malaria seemed to spread more quickly. Many people had to go to the doctor and to the hospital. Some people died. She said, 'Sometimes it would rain for three or four months, people sick, everything wet, and sometimes there was nothing to eat".

Waiting to Leave the Refugee Camp

Once at the refugee camp, people had to decide if they wanted to go back to Somalia or apply to go to another country. Most people wanted to go to another country to seek safety. There were so many people and the process took a long time. Each person, or family, had to complete the necessary paperwork to apply for refugee status in another country. Then they just waited. Most of the time in the refugee camp was based on waiting to be allowed to go someplace else. Individuals and family members were interviewed to ensure that they were related to the individuals they wanted to travel with, and to ensure that they were healthy. They also needed an American sponsor to support them in coming to the United States. The interviews typically took a long time to get because the people who did the interviews frequently traveled around to all of the refugee camps. Out of the three woman interviewed, the average time spent in a refugee camp was two years.

One woman described her experience and frustration of waiting as follows, "...the next day we go and get a check-up with the doctor and everyone was okay, malaria was a problem for some before. We go everyday for a check-up, if you are not well you are not going. Then we come and they say you go tomorrow at 7:00, whatever time. When you come in - you fly. You come in for a check-up again when we arrive, they say you are okay you will go tomorrow. Then the next day we come back for another check-up before we fly. They gave us some medications, some capsule before we fly. Then we

go". When asked what the medication was, she said that it was something everyone was given so that they would not get others sick with malaria.

Another woman described her experience as frustrating because of the paperwork that needed to be in order. She was planning to come to the United States with her uncle's children. Her uncle's son died of malaria after their departure date was planned. Since the sponsor was expecting all of them to come and the dead man's name was on their paperwork, they had to go and get written proof from the hospital that he had died. This delayed their planned departure date.

Findings in response to research question #2...

What are the barriers that make resettlement into a new culture complex?

In the United States

Once in the United States, each of the women were initially resettled into different locations including Maryland, Missouri, and Minnesota. They did not choose any of these locations, nor did they have family in any of these places. It is interesting to understand how all three of them moved to Minnesota. One of the women came to Minnesota initially and has lived here ever since. A second, moved here to get away from her abusive husband. Her sister lived in Minnesota. Unfortunately, he followed her here. The third woman moved from Maryland because there were no other Somali people. She said, "Maryland not good, few Somalians. Every three months or so I see a Somalian. Not good". She then moved to New York with her husband, and then to Minnesota to reunite with family and friends.

Barriers to Living in the United States

When asked what it meant to one of the women to be a refugee, she stated, "I don't feel comfortable. That's what happened, we had no choice. One day I hope that I'll

go back to my home country. The reason that I want to go back is freedom and to get a good job. I know that I can make enough money to support my family in Somalia. It is hard to get a job here because I don't speak English well enough". This statement seemed to suit all of the women interviewed. They have been able to make a new life here for their families. However, they miss their culture and living in a familiar environment. The desire to improve their English and to get a good job to support their families was a common theme.

One of the women spoke specifically about her difficulty in finding a job. She said that it was problematic for her to search for a job because she did not understand the process for finding employment. She said, "When getting a job, they ask if I have a resume. I don't know what that is. Completing applications is difficult. There is so much to read and difficult to complete. I had to learn how to write my first and last name, and simple things like how to write the date". She also discussed the issues of having a work permit, waiting for a green card, getting a Social Security card, and knowing what to do with that information. She went on to say, "...in Somalia, you find job and you work. It is not so confusing". When asked what the most difficult part of living in the United States was, one woman stated, "Job. I'm so desperate to get a job. Wherever I go, they ask me about my English abilities and it is very difficult for me".

There was a common concern about weather, especially moving from a warm climate to Minnesota. One of the women was terribly disturbed about summer storms in Minnesota. She recalled an event last summer when the lights went out and all of the tenants had to go to the basement of the apartment complex. She said that it was scary when the storm sirens went off, it made her think of alarms and loud noises that went off during the war in Somalia.

The challenge of learning the American system was another common theme. For two of the women, specifically, who have been dealing with legal issues related to filing

for divorces. One woman noted, "In Somalia, we just say I don't want to be married anymore and everyone says that's fine. Here there's a lot of paperwork".

The woman interviewed, who had been part of an abusive relationship, had many challenges to overcome in the United States. Most of all, she lacked an understanding of the legal system in the United States. At first, she said when the abuse began, "I didn't do anything. I didn't speak English. I didn't report anything". Upon the suggestion of a social service worker who was helping the family in their resettlement process, she began to call the police when her husband was verbally threatening her, or physically abusing her. They came out to their house a number of times and put her husband in jail, and then issued a restraining order against her husband. However, due to the Somali woman's lack of understanding of the legal process, her rights as a woman in the United States, and her dependency on her husband for his knowledge of English and financial support of her, she felt helpless. She continued to go back to her husband, or to allow him back in her home.

Another interesting perspective was the involvement of her husband's Somali family and the Somali community. She felt unsupported by them because they told her that she needed to take her husband back. When her husband's family got involved they told her husband, "This lady, you can't beat her. If you don't want her just leave her alone". Then when he refused to leave her, his family came to her and told her that she needed to take him back. She explained. "One day he came back with his father and mother, they lived in the same city, his father tell me that he's (her husband) is not going to do anything anymore. He wants you and he loves you and he wants to get you back. I said no. He was with his parents and I said that he was not coming in my house. He knocked the door down and said that this was his house. He said, 'I want to live in my house'. I called the police and he tried to hit me, all of them left. They had a car. The police went to his mom's house and told him not to come to my house again".

She then had a restraining order issued against him and he had been in jail several times for beating her. When she told him that she was moving to Minnesota, he followed her. When living in Minnesota with her sister, his friends came to her house. They said, "he will be okay, there will be no problems. If more problems he will go to jail for a long time. I believed them and was scared to be in a new state with few people that I knew. I let him move back with me". He then lived with her and their two children until June 2000. That is when he beat her again. She has not talked to him now for ten months, although she knows that he calls occasionally because she recognizes his phone number on her Caller ID. She is currently waiting for their divorce to be final.

Positive Aspects of Living in Minnesota: Support

When the participants were asked about their positive experiences of living in Minnesota, all three of them stated that they lived in a good community. They felt that they were supported by friends, family, neighbors, and community members. One advantage that all three of the women share is that they initiate getting support by utilizing a neighborhood community center. The women described their positive experiences as follows: "...nice community. When I have a problem I come to different people. I have many friends here". Another woman stated, "We came to Minnesota first, I feel comfortable and happy", and the third woman replied, "There is a large Somali group and programs to learn and training for things that I need to help me get a job. It is good to meet at groups with other women. Good support with food shelf and clothes shelf".

The large Somali population in Minnesota was a common factor for all of them to live here, and to feel connected. The participants noted that having friends and family living near to them was important to them, especially because they can relate to their hurting and loss. They feel that living near other Somalis is a good support for them. They help each other out and are all learning as they adapt to this new culture. The

positive aspect is that with such a large Somali population, they are able to keep many of their Somali and Islamic traditions and culture and incorporate them into American culture.

The Somali population in Minnesota also helps keep others in contact with Somalia. Somalians regularly talk to their family members and friends who are still living in Somalia. When living in the United States, many keep each other informed about the war conditions, violence, life in the refuge camps, and familiar friends and family. When one person talks to someone in Somalia, they typically share that information with many others in their community.

Findings in response to research question #3...

What are the most significant coping skills needed to survive the refugee experience?

Survival Skills

When the participants were asked what survival skills motivated them to survive the war and overcome their past obstacles, all of them said prayer and their belief in Allah. The connection that the Somali culture has with the Islamic religion supports their strength in day-to-day living. One of the women stated, "It has been difficult but I know that it has been Allah's plan for me".

Another survival skill that the women exhibit is determination. Each of them has their own personal strength and determination that allowed them to survive to this point. They have left their families, friends and homeland, survived war, survived living in a refugee camp, and are now adapting to a new culture and environment. One woman explained her gratitude toward the United States for assistance. She explained, "The United States helped us become settled. What we (refugees) need to do now is give them back something, get a job and not be supported by the government. In Somalia, the

government would not be as kind. They do not support people like in the United States". She continued by stating that she wanted the media to give everyone in the United States good information about Somalians. She said that they are hard-working and want to be respected. They do not want to live off of the welfare system. However, now that the United States brought them here, she feels that the government should offer more training so that the Somalis can become self-sufficient. The women are determined to support themselves, and their families in the United States.

This was not discussed in the interviews, but as the observer I will add that another survival skill that all three of the women demonstrated in the interviews was a sense of acceptance and peace. They have accepted what their current lives are here in the United States. Even if they would like to go back to Somalia to live or to visit, they accept and appreciate that they are alive and have the opportunity to make a new life for themselves. I did not observe any self-pity from the participants nor them wanting me to feel bad for them. They were strong women who have endured a lot of difficult issues in their lives.

Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the themes presented in the interviews with three Somali refugee women who are currently living in Minnesota. Their stories are intertwined throughout the chapter to describe their experiences as refugees. The interview process allowed the common themes in each of the interviews to be shared in a chronological order according to the war experience of leaving one's homeland, a description of the war and witnessed violence, life in the refugee camp, the barriers and positive aspects of living in the United States, and ending with a description of the survival skills portrayed by the participants.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter discusses the significant findings of the study based on the three interviews that were completed with Somali refugee women. The findings coincide with the literature review in regard to the war experience. However, the findings expand the personal aspect of the war experience, leaving one's homeland, living in a refugee camp, and being resettled into an unfamiliar culture. Secondly, use of theoretical frameworks, including cognitive theory and ecological systems theory, address how some of the refugee issues may be explained. Next, implications for social work practice will be discussed, followed by a proposal for two policies that may positively affect refugees in the future. Finally, implications for further research on this topic will be suggested.

Discussion

The research data collected from the three interviews in this qualitative study offer insight to explain the refugee experiences of Somali women. More importantly, the intent of this research project was to gain a better understanding of the refugee experience from the women, themselves. In this process, the women were encouraged to share their stories to teach the researcher and others through this written thesis about the realities of war and the long-term impact that it has on individuals and their families.

As the researcher, I can say with confidence that it is a challenge to put into words the stories that were shared in the interview process. Along with the verbal description of their experiences, was the body language that portrayed sadness, grief, happiness when sharing fond memories, and the look of fear when recounting violence and visions from the war. As one woman gestured the shape of a gun with her hand repeatedly when discussing the war, another had sad, dark eyes when asked about her family in Somalia. Each of the stories were unique as they pertained to the individual women, yet similar as they shared a common pattern of events.

The findings from the study concurred with the data found in the literature review as it pertained to the war experience, and the common chronological events that occurred with many refugees. However, throughout the interviews with the three Somali women, I was able to get their personal accounts to explain the meaning of the refugee experience. Based on the data gathered in the interviews, the most "real" and personal information came from visually seeing the women share their stories. The pain showed in their body language, as did the joy in describing what it was like to live in Somalia before the war. The themes present in the interviews included meaning to the experiences of leaving one's family and loved ones behind, seeking safety, life in a refugee camp, the bureaucracy of waiting to move to a new country, the barriers and positive experiences of living in the United States, and the survival skills which allowed the women to endure such sadness, grief, and upheaval in their lives. The violence and trauma of war was described in the literature review, as well as from the personal stories from the women interviewed.

Each of the Somali women who were interviewed had their own personal description of the refugee experience. In comparing the three shared stories, it is evident that support from family members had an impact on how each woman perceived her experience. The one woman who came to the United States with her husband and children appeared happier and more content in the interview. She also appeared more positive about her refugee experience, despite the fact that she is unable to find a good job due to her lack of English-speaking abilities. The other two women traveled with relatives, not close family members. Both of them described their experience of leaving Somalia with more sadness and apparent grief. Furthermore, for both of the women, it took a longer span of time for them to settle into a comfortable living arrangement in the United States. One of them lived in Maryland and New York prior to moving to Minnesota. The other woman lived in Missouri, then moved to Minnesota. The last two women described have had hardship since they have been in the United States. They both

described the need for support from other Somalis, which encouraged them to move to Minnesota due to the large Somali population that exists in Minnesota. Also, the two women have both had a difficult time in their personal lives as they are currently awaiting divorces. They are now both separated form their husbands and are single mothers.

Findings Related to Theoretical Frameworks

The findings are supported by both cognitive theory and ecological systems theory. In using ecological systems theory as a theoretical framework, it is evident that the women interviewed suffered due to loss of connection with their loved ones, culture, and familiar surroundings. This has continued to be a struggle for them as they have adapted to a new environment. Specifically, the area of finding employment stands out as an area of concern for the women. The process is different, and more in depth, in the United States than in Africa. Plus they have had to deal with the language barriers between themselves and their employers.

A major point of ecological systems theory is how one aspect of an individual's life impacts other aspects (Ashford, Lecroy, & Lortie, 1997). The female Somali refugees that were interviewed have survived tremendous stress that has impacted their lives. Use of this theory helps explain that stress and difficulties related to resettlement into an unfamiliar country, based on the loss of a familiar support system, will impact individuals in their daily activity. This may explain some of the difficult family situations that were addressed in the interviews, such as divorce or family conflicts. Furthermore, use of ecological systems theory may explain the "unsettled" feeling that two of the participants described in their move to different cities. The idea of living in Minnesota, in a Somali community, was favorable to all of the participants. That would support the idea that they want to connect themselves with their culture and familiar people as much as possible to regain a support system.

Cognitive theory can also be used to explain the refugee experience from the participant's perspective. Cognitive theory is based on the idea that one's behavior is shaped by their belief about self, expectations of self, and their perception of the world (Turner, 1996). Use of cognitive theory may be applied cross-culturally since it is based on the individual's perception. When analyzing the data, it is evident that the women shared their own personal stories based on their perception of reality. It may be possible that they remembered aspects of their experience incorrectly, especially if it was too difficult for them to remember accurate details. Further, all of the women have survived tremendous stress which may effect their current reality. The response to the questions was based on each women's own personal experiences.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Social Work Practice

The findings from this study provide personal descriptions about the experiences of Somali refugee women who have left their homeland and are currently living in Minnesota. The findings offer insight into the experiences based on the perception from interviews performed with Somali women. These personal accounts may be helpful for social workers who are working with refugee clients. The history that the refugees have endured is important in understanding the impact that it has on their current day-to-day situations.

This research was completed in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the refugee experience. This includes learning about the cultural differences, including the significance of the Somali women's dress apparel, customs and holidays that are celebrated, roles of Somali men and women, and their family dynamics. Islamic religious beliefs of most of the Somali people impact their daily activities with praying five times a day and following the written Koran. Social workers who are working directly with the

Somali population need to have an understanding of the Somali culture and an understanding of the Islamic religion, in order to fully understand Somali clients.

The experience of leaving one's homeland, including the loss of family and loved one's, living in a refugee camp, and moving to an unfamiliar country and culture will impact the manner in which an individual adapts to their new environment. The realities of what the three Somali women went through and witnessed as horrific violence and the grief of what they have left behind has an impact on who they are today. Cognitive theory informs us that the refugee's experiences shape who they are today and how they perceive their own personal histories. All three of the women said that they frequently think about their family and friends in Somalia, as well as have nightmares based on their experiences. Their history is living with them daily, and having an effect on their emotional, physical, and mental status. Social workers should have the knowledge to look for signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder which is commonly related to the refugee experience. The history of the clients and knowledge about their traditional culture is crucial for social workers to be aware of, and will assist them in consciously thinking about the experiences that the refugees have endured. This will give social workers an increased sensitivity and understanding about their refugee clients.

Social workers who are working with community members may also benefit from this research. When Somali refugees move into communities, as with all refugees, the communities are affected. Community members need to be trained on how to live in peace and with understanding of their new neighbors. Social workers could have a positive role in assisting Somali refugees in adapting to communities by having an understanding of their culture, but also in teaching community members about the Somali population. Some suggestions for community involvement include: increasing positive media attention to the refugees who are moving to Minnesota, implement city-planned meetings to teach community members about their neighbors from other cultural backgrounds, continue - yet increase- the amount of training directed toward

professionals who daily interface with refugees, and continue to provide translation services to the refugee population so that they are able to receive appropriate services. Most importantly, teach community members the definition of a "refugee". Many people do not understand why there is such a large number of individuals moving to Minnesota from Somalia, or may not even be aware of how many Somali refugees live within their community. If the general public understood the war trauma the refugees have endured, and that they fear for their lives in their homeland, they may have an increased understanding and acceptance of the refugee population. Furthermore, social workers can teach the general public about who refugees are, and explain that most of the refugees in the United States would probably prefer to be living back in their country of origin, providing that it was safe, free of war, and the individuals were not facing political persecution.

Policy

A common theme among the women interviewed was their lack of English speaking abilities. English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are offered, and all of the women have taken them. However, they continue to feel inadequate and self-conscious about speaking English. A concern may be that since there is such a large Somali community in Minnesota, frequently when together they speak Somalian. Based on the interviews, it did not appear that English was spoken at home, or among friends and/or family. It would benefit the Somali refugees to be encouraged to learn English, or even reinforced through policy that they be required to learn English within a certain time-frame of living in the United States. It would be difficult for the newly arrived refugees to learn English aggressively when they first arrive, but it would benefit them more as they attend schools or look for employment.

Another concern from the women was the lack of high-paying jobs for refugees. Again this relates to their English speaking abilities. A suggestion from one of the

women was for the United States to offer training programs for Somali refugees, as well as other refugees. The ideas were based on her feeling that the United States brought refugees here, and now they should train them appropriately so that the refugees can live independently. The Somali woman was very clear in stating that she wanted to support herself and not be dependent on government assistance. She felt that she owed it to the United States to support herself. A suggested implementation for policy may include job training programs coinciding with ESL classes.

Discrimination may also be a factor in employment or in other areas of concern for Somali refugees. Continuing to follow current policies which prohibit discrimination in the work place will allow for refugees to have a fair chance at obtaining employment, granted that they are qualified for the position. An increased monitoring of current polices would support less discrimination in the work place, on applications for an apartment, in schools, encounters with law enforcement, and when applying for financial loans.

Implications for Research

This study reflects the findings of only three women who identify themselves as Somali refugees. All three of them are currently living in Minnesota. The findings from a different group of women, or from refugees who have fled a country other than Somalia, may vary. Due to the large influx of Somali refugees in Minnesota, there is a continued need to learn more about the Somali refugee experience, about their culture, and about who they are as individuals.

Further research is needed to learn more about the refugee experiences of all individuals coming from different countries to the United States. This will allow for people who are currently living in the United States to gain a better understanding of who the new coming individuals are, and to learn about their past experiences and cultures. Most of us, social workers, or not, will interact with a Somalian refugee at some time.

Whether it is in practice, at the grocery store, on the bus, at the park, etc. If we do not make an attempt to learn about our neighbors, there will be continued problems with misunderstandings in communities and in everyday practice.

Continued research is necessary to define how communities can assist and support refugees. Further definition of the impact that the refugee experience has on an individual physically, emotionally, and mentally would benefit professionals and communities who support refugees.

Limitations of Research Study

There are limitations to this research study including the small sample size. Also, all three of the women were chosen from a Somali women's support group at a community center. These women were receiving support by community members which may not pertain to the larger Somali population of female refugees in the United States. Furthermore, the women are living in Minnesota, in a metropolitan area, with a potential for more resources than if they were living in a rural community.

Summary

This chapter has provided a discussion of the relevant findings as they pertain to the meaning of the Somali refugee experience. Furthermore, this chapter has presented implications for practice, policy suggestions, and implications for future research. This thesis offered an in-depth look at the refugee experience, based on the perception of three Somali refugee women. They were kind enough to share their stories so that others could learn from their experiences. The purpose of this research project is to offer a personal view of the journey through the refugee experience. The women's stories, words, vivid descriptions, and body language portrayed to this researcher more than words can say on paper. Through this qualitative study, it has been the intent to discover the meaning of leaving one's home country, to gain a better understanding of the coping skills needed to

survive the refugee experience, and to identify the barriers that make resettlement into a new culture complex. I believe these points have been answered by the women who were willing to share their stories, and throughout the common themes present in each of the interviews.

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Appendix A

CONSENT FORM
(Augsburg College IRB Number 2001-18-1)

The Refugee Experiences of Somali Women: A Qualitative Study

You are invited to participate in my research study designed to look at the refugee experience from the perspective of Somali women who have survived war, fled their homelands, and are now living in the United States. This study is intended to gain a better understanding of the refugee experience. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be involved in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. This research study is being conducted by Lisa Valiquet in partial fulfillment of the Master of Social Work Thesis requirement at Augsburg College.

What will happen during the study?

The study consists of one audiotaped interview lasting about 60 minutes. I will conduct the interview. You will be asked to share stories about your experience living in Somalia, leaving your home country, and being resettled into the United States. After the interview is complete, I will listen to the audiotapes and write an interpretation. I will then contact you once again and ask that you review my interpretation of your interview. Changes may be made to the written interpretation to reflect your comments.

Are there any risks?

It is possible that through the discussion and recollection of your story, painful memories or thoughts could occur. If at any point during the interview you feel too uncomfortable to go on, you may stop the interview without consequence. After the interview, the following 24-hour counseling referrals are available for you to contact should the need arise:

Hennepin County/Minneapolis Area	**Crisis Intervention Center**	**(612) 347-3161**
Ramsey County /St. Paul Area	**Regions Hospital**	**(651) 221-8922**
7 County Metro Area	**Crisis Connection**	**(612) 379-6363**
	The Center for Victims of Torture	**(612) 627-1400**

Are there any benefits?

It is possible that you could experience an enhanced sense of well being or satisfaction as a result of telling your story, as well as the opportunity to inform humanity about surviving the war, leaving your homeland, and resettling into a new country. Also, participants will receive an honorarium of $20.00 for participating.

When and where will the interview be done?

The interview will be scheduled at a time and place that are convenient for you. Interviews will be done in person.

Who will have access to the interview material?

The audiotaped interviews will be transcribed by the researcher. The transcripts will be shared with the researcher's thesis advisor during the process of writing the thesis paper. All information is confidential. However, the researcher cannot guarantee anonymity due to the small sample size, but I will make every attempt possible. No names or identifiable information will be used in this study on the transcripts. Raw data, including audiotapes, will be destroyed no later than August 31, 2001.

What if you change your mind?

You are free to withdraw from this study or refuse permission for the use of your interview or transcript at any time and the $20.00 honorarium will be yours to keep. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with Augsburg College.

Appendix B

Before you sign this form, please ask any questions on aspects of the study that are unclear. I will attempt to answer any questions you may have prior to, during, or following the interview. If I am unable to answer any questions to your satisfaction, you may also call my thesis advisor, Sharon Patten at (612) 330-1723.

AUTHORIZATION:

I, _____, have read this consent form and have decided to participate in the research project described on the previous page. I realize that my signature indicates that I give permission for information that I provide during the interview to be used for a thesis project. I will be given a copy of this form for my records.

_____ _____
Signature of Participant *Date*

_____
Phone Number - Where I can contact you to verify my interpretation of your interview/experience

IN ADDITION:

I consent to be audiotaped.

_____ _____
Signature of Participant *Date*

I consent to the use of direct quotes from my interview.

_____ _____
Signature of Participant *Date*

If you have any questions or concerns, you may reach me at:
Lisa Valiquet
Augsburg College, MSW Student
(651) 610-1609

Or if you would like further information, you may contact my thesis advisor at:
Sharon Patten, Ph. D.
Augsburg College
(612) 330-1723

Appendix C

The Refugee Experiences of Somali Women: A Qualitative Study

(Augsburg College IRB Number 2001-18-1)

Screening Form

Speak English? _____ Yes _____No

Native from Somalia: _____Yes _____No

Came to the United States with refugee status? _____Yes _____No

Age:_____ (Required between 18 and 50)

Lived in the United States for at least two years? _____Yes _____No

Appendix D

Interview Questions
(Augsburg College IRB Number 2001-18-1)
To be asked by the researcher

(1) Please describe what it was like to live in Somalia. What do you remember the most?

(2) What are your positive memories of your homeland?

(3) Do you have any sad memories?

(4) Tell me about the war. What happened when your family had to leave your home?

(5) Where did you go to seek safety? Did you live in a refugee camp? Please explain.

(6) What does it mean to you to be a refugee?

(7) What survival skills motivated you to survive the war and moving to the United States? Did you want to be resettled in the United States?

(8) What is it like for you to live in the United States? (Cultural differences, food, housing, schools, laws, religion, etc.).

(9) Tell me about your family. If you have children, how are they adapting to this new culture?

(10) What is the most difficult part of living in Minnesota?

(11) Tell me about your positive experiences of living in Minnesota.

(12) Do you feel that you have enough support? This may include services that you are receiving, or a general feeling of support from people that you know. (family, community support, medical, social agencies, etc.)

(13) Is there anything that you would like to share?